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Your Right to Know

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BANGLADESH  
UPDATE414  
New cases in 24hrs4,186  
Total cases127  
Deaths108  
RecoveriesGLOBAL  
UPDATE185,494  
Deaths2,659,557  
Total cases

# Risks lurk in reopen move

*Say experts about govt decision to allow export-oriented factories to resume work; labour leaders dub it 'one country, two policies'*

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and RASHIDUL HASAN

The government yesterday extended the ongoing shutdown of most of the public and private offices till May 5 in a bid to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus in the country.

However, factories, including pharmaceuticals and export-oriented manufacturing units, can resume operation by ensuring health safety of workers, according to the circular issued by the public administration ministry yesterday.

Experts say the government decision to reopen factories, mostly garment units, will increase the risk of wider transmission of the virus.

The government might have made the move considering the country's economy, but it should not allow any factory to operate unless proper health safety measures and social distancing are ensured at workplaces, they noted.

Labour leaders dubbed the decision to reopen factories as "one country, two policies" and said it would put workers in a more vulnerable situation.

## EXTENSION OF SHUTDOWN

This is the fourth time the government has extended shutdown after it first announced the closure of all public and private offices on March 23.

As per yesterday's circular, the emergency services related to the supply of power, water, gas and fuel, activities at ports, and telephone, internet and postal services will remain out of the purview of the shutdown.

There is no restriction on movement of doctors, nurses, health workers and media persons. Besides, the shutdown will not be applicable to vehicles carrying perishable items, agricultural products, medicines and health workers.

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## THE AGONY OF WAITING

Tired of waiting for a truck of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, Aleya Begum falls asleep beside a road in the capital's Mothertek area. Aleya along with many others from the low income group had been in a queue there since 4:00am yesterday to buy essentials at cheaper prices from the truck, which did not arrive until noon when this photo was taken. The bricks on the pavement are placeholders for people in queue.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

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## TACKLING COVID-19 Hasina calls for a global partnership

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for forging a collective global partnership and greater unity to fight the coronavirus pandemic as she placed a five-point proposal that includes devising meaningful strategies.



At a virtual regional conference, titled "Enhancing regional cooperation in South Asia to combat Covid-19-related impact on its economics", organised by The World Economic Forum (WEF), "The world is perhaps facing the biggest crisis in the last 100 years. So, we need to face the crisis together ... We need an approach of collective responsibility and partnership from every society,"

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## 12 devotees max in Tarabi prayers

*Govt issues directive; Ramadan likely to begin tomorrow*

UNB, Dhaka

A maximum of 12 people, including two imams, can attend Tarabi prayers at a mosque during the holy month of Ramadan.

The religious affairs ministry issued a directive yesterday in this regard.

The step was taken to prevent the spread of coronavirus in the country.

The ministry also said its earlier directive on avoiding mosques and offering prayers at home would remain in force.

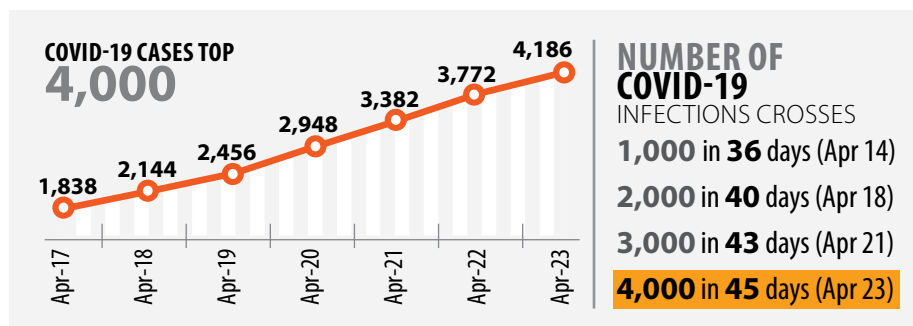
Besides, no public gathering in the name of Iftar Mahfil would be allowed, it said, adding that a circular would be issued today in this regard.

On April 6, the ministry asked people to offer Zohr prayers at home instead of

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## 'Things better than in US, Europe'

*Health minister claims citing numbers from first 45 days, doesn't mention number of tests*



WASIM BIN HABIB and MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

Despite the continued surge in the number of confirmed Covid-19 deaths and cases, Health Minister Zahid Maleque yesterday claimed that Bangladesh was better off than the US and some European countries.

He presented the number of total confirmed deaths and infections in Italy, Spain and the US 45 days after the first case was detected there and said far fewer people died in Bangladesh from the disease

and contracted the virus by the 45th day, which was yesterday.

The health minister at the government's daily briefing on the coronavirus outbreak picked the three countries that reported the highest number of deaths and infections to compare with Bangladesh.

The officials announced seven deaths and 414 new cases after testing 3,416 samples. This brought the death toll to 127 and confirmed cases to 4,186 in Bangladesh.

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## Covid-19 taking a toll on cops

*218 infected, 652 in quarantine*

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and MAHUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

A total of 218 policemen tested Covid-19 positive as of yesterday while 652 others of the force are in quarantine, says the Police Headquarters (PHQ).

According to the PHQ database, Dhaka Metropolitan Police has the highest number of infected officials with 80 positive cases reported, followed by 33 in Gazipur, 17 in Gopalganj and 11 in Narayanganj.

In a statement, the PHQ said, many of the members contracted the virus in the line of duty, adding that the infected officials were receiving treatment at police hospitals across the country.

Amid this backdrop, Bangladesh Police has reorganised the responsibilities of some of its units and asked them to shift their primary focus so that the law and order situation stays under control during the coronavirus menace.

For example, Police Bureau of Investigation, a specialised unit for investigating old and lengthy cases,

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## All low-priority projects to halt

*Finance division issues circular; announces compensation for govt employees on front line*

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

As the government is having to allocate additional funds for certain sectors to combat the coronavirus outbreak, it has suspended financing for all "low priority" projects in the Revised Annual Development Programme (RADP) for this fiscal year, officials said.

A government circular, issued yesterday, said, "Ministries/divisions will take prior permission from the finance division before releasing or spending funds for 'low-priority' projects."

Finance division officials said the permission is likely to be given only for distribution of salaries and wages of those linked to the projects, not for any development work.

The circular also said the projects marked "highest priority" would continue as usual. Ministries and divisions implementing "medium priority" projects would spend funds "only when it is a must", it said.

Projects related to agriculture and health, however, will remain outside the purview of the circular, it said.

Talking to The Daily Star, finance division officials said the number of total projects in the revised ADP is 1,597, which are worth around Tk 1,92,921 crore.

In March, the authorities finalised categorising the projects depending on their priority status as high, medium or low. Of the projects, 330 are "low priority" projects amounting to around Tk 20,000 crore, said the officials.

On the other hand, "high priority" projects include the Padma Bridge, Metro Rail and Karnaphuli Tunnel projects, they said.

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## 5 more die showing Covid-19 symptoms

STAR REPORT

Five people have died of Covid-19-like symptoms in three districts in the last two days. Samples from their bodies were collected for coronavirus tests.

A 14-year-old girl and an elderly woman died of coronavirus-like symptoms at the isolation unit of Chandpur General Hospital yesterday. They were from Faridganj upazila, reports a correspondent from the district, quoting doctors.

The woman, aged 75, was admitted to the hospital on Tuesday night with fever, cold, cough and breathing problems. She passed away around 1:00am yesterday, said Dr Suja-ud-Daula, resident medical officer at the hospital.

The girl, who showed similar symptoms, was admitted to the hospital on Wednesday. She breathed her last around 11:00am yesterday, the doctor added.

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The use of combine harvesters have been on the rise in Sylhet's haor areas due to shortage of efficient farm labourers. Although the equipment is not suitable for farmlands of the haor, it is cost effective. This photo was taken at a haor in Sunamganj recently.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

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## FARM MACHINERY FOR HAOR

## Subsidy hiked as dilemma remains

*Imported harvesters cost effective, helpful amid labour crisis but not suitable for region, say experts, farmers*

DWOHA CHOWDHURY and MINTU DESHWARA

The government recently declared 70 percent subsidy for farmers of the haor region, up from the previous 50 percent, for the purchase of agriculture machinery.

But how the decision is affecting the farmers? Specially when they are harvesting Boro braving Covid-19 and facing acute shortage of experienced farm workers?

The agriculture ministry is encouraging the use of combine harvesters and reapers as they are cost effective, but experts say these machines are not so useful in haor land because of the region's topography.

Combine harvester is a versatile machine for reaping, threshing and winnowing while reapers are used only for reaping paddy.

Selim Raza Chowdhury, a well-off farmer of Sukhair Razapur Uttar in Dharmapasha upazila, Sunamganj, bought a combine harvester this year.

"I own 108 acres of paddy land but could harvest only 18 acres due to the crisis of labour. Considering the fact that the labour crisis will be permanent, I purchased a combine harvester this year and will buy another one along with more machines like rice transplanter soon," he said.

Md Nazmul Islam, Dharmapasha upazila agriculture officer, said, "The harvester selling company says the machine can harvest 1 acre per hour, which will be 70 to 80 decimals per hour in the reality of haor. But due to the shortage of farm workers, people are showing interest, and five harvesters were sold in this upazila this year."

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